

ADULTS

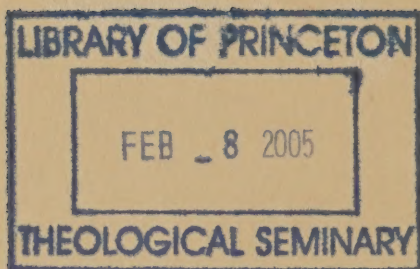
IN

CRISIS

by

Professor James Edwin Loder, Ph.D.

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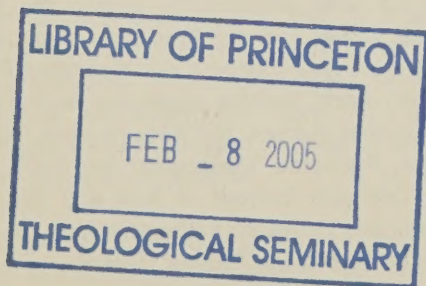
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Sunday, November 9, 1969



The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, in establishing **The John Sutherland Bonnell Lectureship in Pastoral Psychology**, has sought not only to honor the man after whom the lectureship is named, but also to perpetuate and enhance his important work by bringing annually before the academic, medical and theological communities of New York City outstanding psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and pastors whose lectures, when heard, published and circulated, will contribute something of permanent value to all those who seek to serve Jesus Christ in the ministry of pastoral counseling and spiritual therapy.

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During his brief professional career **The Reverend Dr. James E. Loder** has authored two principal books, *Religion in the Public Schools* and *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith*, besides appearing regularly in religious educational journals. He holds degrees from Carleton College, Princeton Theological Seminary, Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. In 1961-62 he held a Research Fellowship from the Menninger School of Psychiatry, Topeka, Kansas.



# ADULTS IN CRISIS

by JAMES EDWIN LODER

I think Dr. Bonnell was the first one who introduced to me the area of "the cure of souls" in a course by that name. If nothing else, this lecture may be taken as an expression of my gratitude for his teaching and for his contributions to the combined fields of religion and psychology. Later on I want to make specific reference to a critical episode presented to a class where I sat as his student. However, before going into that, I want to define my terms and set forth a general problem in the area of human development in our society.

## I. The Terms and the Problem

I was asked to speak on the topic, "Adults in Crisis." This will not be a discussion of case histories; it will be an analysis of some dimensions in the crisis of human development during what we may still call the middle years, let's say 33 and thereafter until retirement. The major crisis during this period is, according to Erik Erikson, a matter of choosing between generativity or stagnation. The strength which emerges on the positive side of this choice, he says, is the capacity to care; so I will call this the crisis of caring.

My interpretation of this is, based on Erikson and others, that these are the years when a demand is made by the younger generation against the older. The demand is a two-edged sword: they would wrest the power from the adult "establishment" in return for which they would also like to receive the full blessing and support of those same adults. The older generation has, or so it thinks, the choice to accept, reject, or split the demand, i.e. surrendering the power but withholding the blessing or bestowing the blessing but withholding the power. This is a cross-cultural type of struggle and has probably existed in some form from the primal horde down to the present.

My impression is that this situation at the present in American society is not unique because of any new elements in the

crisis itself. There are perhaps more irreversible decisions which can now be made on the part of wayward youth due to drug usage, and on the other hand some conditions of emotional illness which were once thought to be irreversible now can be improved. There are variables of this kind, but the critical variable seems to be the fact that the same elements persist in a crisis which is greatly prolonged, and as a consequence normal conflict between the generations is greatly intensified in our society and the principal parties are more rigidly polarized.

In order to bring this picture into a sharp focus, I will use a modified model of neurotic interaction. This will not, of course, cover every situation, but it will be close enough to the center to catch some of the dynamics. In this neurotic interaction model the younger generation suffers from the ambivalence of openness. The evidence for the ambivalence is the self-righteousness with which openness is demanded. Specifically, there is the demand for an unrestricted right just to be worth something without having to achieve it. This is coupled with the persistent protest against the Protestant ethic as unethical. There is the more patent ambivalence associated with the blurring of the conventional lines between the sexes. Also note with McLuhan that the openness which craves participatory democracy also demands participatory speech; that is, there is an in-language of openness which keeps changing and you have to "groove" with it or be closed out. Of course, the most prominent symbol of openness is nudity — not really a very new thing — but, as has frequently been pointed out, none of this contemporary "exposure" is for sheer fun or much enjoyed. It all has a deep-running moral purpose: namely, to open up and liberate the "establishment" from its hypocrisy. This moral purpose is hedged about and running over with anxious fear of set-patterning lest it become oppressive; yet nothing is more oppressive than the self-righteousness which underlies the quest for a liberated openness. The demand seems to be: "Give us the freedom we cannot give ourselves, but do it without being yourself and do it with our full knowledge of every phase; and, incidentally, don't forget to give us credit for it when it comes about." The ambivalence of close-minded openness has been intensified in our society by the prolonged moratorium on identity solutions and the rise of the increasingly popular idea of the protean man

as an alternative to a situation in which the younger generation sees no viable adult model.

The older generation, on the other hand, suffers from the ambivalence of closure. This seems to me more complex, so I will take it up summarily from just three standpoints: two focal areas in social psychological research and an historical perspective. The first body of research is that which was done on the authoritarian personality in which it was pointed out that persons who were conventualistic, close-minded, given to stereotyping and projectivity (tended to believe that wild and dangerous things were going on in the world) often had deep-running sexual ambivalences. Thus, the really strong man who is appealing rigidly to law and order is himself aware, perhaps only at some latent level, of a desire to act out in the same fashion as the younger generation. This forces him under stress to be all the more rigid. I don't think I need to develop at length the point that this particular personality syndrome functions well in certain positions of authority where the issues are black and white and scapegoating is in order. Interpreting beyond this research I would say, in the past the blacks have been the scapegoat; now as if to identify with the aggressor, the militant blacks scapegoat the "establishment."

The second body of research refers to the achievement motive in which the necessity to achieve in order to be worth something grows out of middle and upper middle-class family patterns in which there is early independence training, great competitive struggle in school for academic distinction and a grand push for top college placement. Among these persons, who are particularly well-suited to the ways of the American establishment, there is another kind of ambivalence (which often gives rise to ulcers). In these same achievement-oriented persons there is a repressed desire for ascriptive warmth, a home, and particularly for a non-competitive mother who would not make the young man or woman earn his kisses and hugs.

I am suggesting against both these types of personality syndromes, which syndromes seem reasonably prevalent in the "establishment," that the new free youth movement is a dramatic polarization. The youth seem to be claiming and living out the



very things which the "establishment" has denied itself in order to get ahead; on the other hand, the youth seem to be latently reflecting a desire to be the establishment as evidenced by their own ambivalence, particularly their covert oppressiveness.

The key factor of our current historical situation is a prolongation of the crisis which implicitly seems to justify the free youth position. Most of those who now run the "establishment" were old enough to know what America accomplished through careful planning, self-denial, unquestioned patriotism and tremendous technological efforts before the watershed year of 1945. They saw it work to win World War II. But the undergraduates of today, most all born since 1945, have never seen the "establishment" solve any of the major problems which have arisen since then. In 1945 we won the war and used nuclear power to exterminate two Japanese cities. In 1945 we assumed the position of the major world power and inherited from Western Europe the responsibility for world order and the new development of Western Civilization. In 1945 Soviet Russia emerged as the other great power in the world. By 1945 the Communist revolution in China was burgeoning, and we have seen only the mildest expressions of that threat in Korea and Viet Nam. Firm groundwork for the critical Supreme Court decision of 1954 was laid by the integration of Armed Forces which took place in 1945. And finally, the year 1945 marked the year in which the technological and economical revolutions in America began and which brought us to the present state of scientific knowledge and affluence. \* If the younger generation is unconvinced by the life style of the "establishment," I think we may also be sure that the system has lost some confidence in itself. The affluence which the technological and economic revolutions have created is clearly not a solution to any of the great moral issues of our time. Moreover, in a society where "bread is" we are not about to simply resolve our differences in order to get back to earning our bread. The common enemy of potential starvation can no longer unite us. In the absence of the enemy we turn our hostilities more directly upon each other; this bodes well for a *real* solution since the real combatants are more likely to meet face to face. As that popular philosopher, Linus, put it, "We have met the enemy and it is US."

\* Current Issues in Higher Education, 1966, p. 154f.



I have set up the problem as a neurotic cycle, but obviously most of the persons involved are not being treated for a neurosis. By this I do not mean to say merely this is a neurotic society or some other negative platitude like that. I mean to say that the pattern of interaction is destructive to both parties involved. Moreover, it will repeat itself, not just as the generations repeat themselves but, given the situation I have described, there will be with each generation an increasing magnification of the intensity of the interaction and the polarization. This, I think, is the crisis of caring. It is not only a matter concerning our own children and whether they will be a credit to us, but a question of whether we can care enough about their children — the ones we have not even seen yet — to face and to work through the still-manageable problems we most certainly have now with our own children — the ones we see all too often, but never very clearly.

I turn now to the religious dimensions of this cycle and the way in which it seems to contribute more to the crisis than to the caring.

## II. A Religious Dimension

In the total complex of factors involved in such a cycle, I want to focus on one which is not only of special importance for this occasion but which I believe is of ultimate significance for the attainment of a satisfactory resolution. This is the factor of a rise in reductionistic secularism which characterizes our time.

Much evidence of this could be given, but I will just note that studies of the rise of secularism among college-age persons indicate that secularism in our time is repeating itself and it is now at a height unknown in America since the 1920's to the 1930's. The causes for this may be debatable but the modern day decline in commitment to our tradition, I believe, can be described as the triumph of the reality principle. You will recognize this as a fundamentally Freudian notion. Since Freud himself was not too clear in what he meant by this, I will take the liberty of saying how I take it, i.e., what it is and how it operates in the secularization process. Primarily, the reality principle depends upon a well-structured, de-centered or objectified view of space and time

within the ego. This well-structured ego recognizes and adopts established social and institutional patterns — and roles within those patterns — by means of which spontaneity and affect can be controlled. Finally, there is the philosophically dubious but nevertheless functional assumption that a good fit between established social patterns and this structured ego is the norm of sanity.

The secularization process may then be described as the reduction of Christian beliefs and practices to conformity with the reality principle. In the secularization mind-set we want a sane religion; in the face of neurotic interaction among the generations we want to sacralize sanity — to preserve sanity somehow. We want a religion that is in principle predictable and in which conformity to well-established socialized religious patterns is canonical. The logic of secularization is, of course, absurd. One must envision at the far end of such a process a totally computerized situation in which theological thinking, hoping, and believing are all programmed into the operation. A research director from one of the RCA laboratories described this to me once and argued that this was to be the final stage of man. The human body, not being able to stand atomic fallout, would soon be extinct and the survival of the "human" would depend upon our ability to program the intrinsically human, including the religious, aspects of man, and to preserve these in a self-perpetuating machine. While the absurdity of this may be patent, I will just take it seriously long enough to note that a master chess player can still beat a computer, and I would argue along with those who say he can do this precisely because he has a body and that he can, so to say, intuit through his body and its extensions patterns of interaction far more complex and flexible than could be programmed. You may think of this what you like, but it seems to me that if chess is presently beyond the computer, I do not foresee the far greater complexity of religious belief with its inherent claims to novelty as apt to be reproduced in the likes of RCA labs.

If the logic of secularization and conformity to the reality principle has its absurdity, it is also true that the total abandonment of that principle in religious belief and practice is absurd. I remember a case which came up while I was studying at the

Menninger Foundation in which a woman paralyzed by her mental illness was arrested for praying nude in her garden. The psychiatrist in charge, knowing that I was a religious type, asked me why this was not a new Joan of Arc. I said, in effect, that there was in this tragic case a complete loss of touch with the reality principle. This, I think, was essentially the answer, but it failed, as the training psychiatrist pointed out to me, to give much of a constructive account of the relation of the reality principle and religious belief. Abandonment of the reality principle is absurd, even tragic, but much more must be said about what religious belief does to the reality principle.

What follows is a partial answer to this problem and the consequences of such an answer for the adult crisis of caring which I have described above. However, before going on to a development of this answer, let me summarize the major aspects of the problem as I have set it forth: First, in speaking of the crisis of caring, we are speaking of a developmental problem which appears more or less in every culture; essentially it is how to lose power and at the same time bestow blessing on the up-coming winners, the next generation. Second, this developmental inevitability is exaggerated as a problem by certain very common but inadequate patterns of socialization. Third, these patterns of socialization are called into question by historical circumstances, especially developments since 1945. Fourth, the contexts of technology and affluence contribute aggravation to the problem. Fifth, the Christian alternative is emasculated by a secularism which essentially puts the church in the position of sacralizing the conditions of the problem rather than offering a context for its resolution. Finally, I said I thought a key issue at stake here was the relation between religious belief, Christian faith specifically, and the reality principle. What I wish to turn to now is what it might mean to radicalize the reality principle, without computerizing it on the one hand, or abandoning it on the other.

### **III. Toward Solution**

My point of departure here is a case presented to a class entitled "The Cure of Souls" at Princeton Seminary. There I sat as a student and Dr. Bonnell was lecturing. He told how one night he was working late in his office when suddenly something



prompted him to call a woman who was a member of his congregation. He simply sensed that she was in trouble. When he finally reached her, he learned that at the moment of his calling she had been contemplating suicide. The call and the subsequent conversation were able to avert the tragedy.

Instances like this, of which there are many more than most persons have the courage to admit (especially in a secularized society and church) obviously raise many more questions than I can answer. However, this does seem to me to focus the issue of the reality principle and religious belief, in particular the Christian faith, very sharply.

Freud did us a great service in demonstrating with infinite care what kind of religion was neurotic and did indeed need the instructive and corrective power of the reality principle. By this he did not condemn all religion to illness as he thought he did, but he helped us to refine with less confusion exactly how it is that authentic religious belief radicalizes the reality principle; he thereby helped us to draw a more clear-cut line between authentic and unauthentic expressions of the Christian faith by showing us more clearly what was unauthentic. But he left undone an account of authentic religious belief which is yet something more than simply a secularization of a faith. My premise is that Dr. Bonnell's experience affords some direction in saying what radicalization of the reality principle — that is, neither neurotic nor secularized — might be.

There is involved in this episode a radical view of space and time. Space collapses, not merely to the extent of letting Dr. Bonnell be in the same room with the suffering woman, but he actually was able to enter her lived-space. Time was also radicalized; it was no longer a question whether he was working late in the chronological sense; the monotonous rhythm of homogeneous, objective time was suddenly, radically relativized to a dramatic sense of this being the "ripe" time, the critical moment, the fullness of time.

It seems to me that in Jesus' physical odyssey on earth we have the perfect paradigm for space and time thrown into radical

perspective. Do you realize what he did to the Judaic view of space? He revealed the timeless, unlimitable faceless Yahweh within the limits of a man's height, starting in the even more diminished space of a womb. He expanded into the unlimited life-space of God, claiming that he was at one with the Father. This claim puts into perspective his apparent capacity to expand or extend himself almost without limit into the lived-space of other people. You will remember this is what he did when he called Nathaniel. You will recall that he saw Nathaniel sitting under a tree far away in terms of objective space, but Jesus was apparently no further away than Nathaniel's own heart because he knew that he was an "Israelite without guile." When the right time came, "his time" he called it, he shrank to the dimensions of a dead body, and then he completely disappeared, but only to re-appear in a fashion which permitted him to occupy the lived-space of others with or without the objective space so basic to the reality principle. Then, again at the right time, he disappeared by going "up." And we say that was it: the beginning and the end revealed in one abbreviated lifetime.

Whatever you may want to say exegetically, it is perfectly evident that Jesus paradigmatically radicalized the spatio-temporal world of his followers. The Christian life-space is not strictly bound by objective or practical space; it can take it or leave it. The Christian does not have the "correct time" perhaps, but he knows what time it is in the lives of men.

Now, I don't think this is mere theological extrapolation. Let me take just the spatial dimension to illustrate what I mean. We all know the phenomenon of the woman who can extend the sense of her body's height to include the feather — or some more fashionable equivalent — that extends upward from her hat — she can duck just enough to miss the top of the door without stopping to measure. We do the same thing when we park an automobile. We do not measure the room; we must, so to say, extend ourselves into space to make the car fit. Studies of violent men suggest that there is an area of about three feet surrounding such a person as a shell. To step within that shell is to force the violence to the surface: fists clench, pulse rate increases and so on. Anthropologist F. T. Hall argued that we all have our own

space bubble, a lived-space which we demand as human beings in order to live. Forced into crowded conditions we become violent or deeply depressed. Studies being done at the World Council of Churches in Geneva last year were suggesting that the rate of suicide in Geneva could be positively correlated with the small cramped quarters in which people were so often forced to live. This lived-space seems to expand under positive conditions of elation and to contract with disappointment or depression.

This is to say that lived-space is not a given; it is something we intend, something of us which we compose and comport ourselves within. It is not something to which we are innately condemned. Rather, what we learn and come to believe about ourselves, our bodies, our social existence, indeed, our total belief system, is the basis of the lived-space we compose and preserve with our very lives. We compose lived-space in relation to but not necessarily dependent upon objective space. Because we compose lived-space even in the most natural sense on the basis of our *belief* about the spatio-temporal dimensions — and I would say also all the major social dimensions of our existence such as the sexual, the symbolic, and the authoritative are similarly composed — it is possible to suggest the following notions with reference to the specific belief system we call the Christian faith.

The Christian faith claims that the mind which was in Christ Jesus can also be in us, if we will let it. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5) This means that if we will let the mind of Christ Jesus be in us, then his paradigmatic radicalization of the reality principle is not merely a theological construct but is actually formative of our own lived-space, time, and sexuality.

Norman O. Brown once wrote on the abolishment of the reality principle to say that "it is possible to be mad and to be unblest; but it is not possible to get the blessing without the madness; it is not possible to get the illuminations without the derangement." This is the poetry of a Dionysian, yet it comes close to what I want to say, dangerously close, but the difference is crucial. I am saying one must be blest *before* he can have the



madness, the paradigmatic madness, that radicalizes the reality principle. The blessing consists of receiving a new mind — a radical mind — the mind of Christ.

Now the crucial point in regard to Dr. Bonnell's experience is this. The relation between him and his counselee was care and cure, both coming from the Latin "cura," as Dr. Bonnell was the first to point out to me. The reality principle can be radicalized — notice I do not say abandoned — in the name of care. This, it seems to me, is the crux of the Christological paradigm: all the radicalization of reality characteristic of the mind of Christ, as exhibited in Jesus, is for the sake of the care and cure of souls. The reality principle can be radicalized — that is to say, you can take it or leave it and re-compose the world along entirely new lines, without either neurosis or sterility if it is in the name of care. Failing this centrality of caring, radicalization is probably the "madness" without the blessing and foredoomed to destroy itself.

Now we have come full circle. We have seen the adult crisis of our time as a crisis in caring, and we have said that the crisis feeds on the secularization of Christian faith, a reduction of its claims to the terms of the reality principle. On the other hand, we have seen that the *self-understanding* of the Christian faith, revealed paradigmatically in the caring, curing person of Jesus Christ, radicalizes the reality principle, transforming it from a necessity to a live option. Such radicalization means for us that once we are blest, the dimensions of existence can be radically re-composed according to the caring, curing mind of Christ. "Let this mind be in you . . . ," but there is the rub; how do you "let" the reality principle be radicalized? Where is the hinge between our contemporary frustration of caring and the promise of care and cure in the mind of Christ?

#### IV. The Option to Create

To begin with, this letting the reality principle be radicalized is for adults only, i.e., psychologically mature persons who are committed to a Christological interpretation of their maturity as being constantly in the process of unfolding.

In the second place, the notion of Christ's mind in us should force us to consider very seriously the presuppositional view of

Henri Bergson, C. D. Broad and others, that the function of the brain (especially its more advanced centers) and the nervous system and the sense organs — the bio-physical basis of the reality principle — is in the main *eliminative* and not productive. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed by something C. D. Broad called Mind at Large. Or in terms of the Christian belief system, once we are blest, the reality principle permits a measly trickle of the caring Mind of Christ to flow into our awareness, but it eliminates most of it to protect us from too much of the Divine. In a secularized society, we can stand just so much of the holy and no more.

The particular question about the hinge of care concerns Mind at Large, focused for our thinking here as the Christ, who expands our lived-space into dimensions far beyond our perception and more deeply than we can conceptualize into the lived-space of others. What is the connection of this Mind to the conflict which constitutes the contemporary crisis of the generations?

My concluding comments on this question are taken in part from a study which was banned in New York and published in Boston — to reverse a trend. Care and cure of this crisis, whether it appears concretely between father and son, mother and daughter, teacher or president and students, necessitates that one or the other break the cycle by first seeing it and then choosing not to respond according to form. I am counting on the adults to do this — but I may say "adult" could be re-defined as the one who does it. To move beyond the resulting frustration, anxiety and anger, one must meet the conditions of every creative act if he wants something new to emerge. Here I turn to the study by Pettigrew and Pajonas \* for a statement of those conditions and the fashion in which they liberate a relationship. First of all, one must disavow any complete submission to authority; that is, the adult must submit to the possibility that youth may be correct and to the proposition that the only authority that either one can take seriously is the mutual respect that they may create between

\* Pettigrew, Thomas F. and Pajonas, Patricia J., "*Social Psychological Considerations of Racially-Balanced Schools*" published in *Because It is Right—Educationally*, Board of Christian Commonwealth of Massachusetts, April 1965.

them. The second premise is that if something new is to be created, there must be a willingness to enter into and sustain a concern for complexity, in particular the complexity of ambivalent feelings and the necessity for continued ambiguous statements and commitments in the relations between age groups. The point is not to simplify the matter and find out who is to blame; it is rather to be in and endure the situation in as many of its aspects as possible. The third premise is that one must be willing to have and to endure some psychic stress; to hope to resolve matters pleasantly is simply a refusal to resolve matters at all. The fourth premise is that one must be willing to accept the non-rational aspects of himself. He must be open to his own feelings without submitting to them and be willing to learn about himself by looking at, without being overwhelmed by, his fantasies and speculations. Finally, he must be willing to accept and live with wide divergences among persons; individual differences must be acceptable as an outcome. I am saying that creativity in a relationship is maximized when these conditions prevail; or, to put it in terms I used above, these conditions "let" the mind of Christ make things new; maximize the trickle of Christ-mindedness and lets it begin to flow.

Finally, we may come to this conclusion. The crisis of care in adulthood is also a critical opportunity for the incorporation of the Christian faith. Neurosis is flight from that faith; so is secularization. The issue is whether the Christian faith will be polarized and petrified into an ideology designed to rationalize stagnation, or will it be the living ground and resource of continual creativity, the expanding of consciousness and the resolution of conflict. I suggest that if it is to be the latter, the Church must supply a context in which the reality principle can be radicalized continually, a context in which we can celebrate our common creative duality, having a Mind that is ours yet not ours alone, and living in a Newtonian world without believing that it is definitive of reality-as-lived.

This, then, is my closing prayer in the face of the crisis of caring:

"Twofold Always. May God us keep  
From single vision and Newton's sleep."







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